AN: This is it, everyone. The grand finale. All the tension and tragedy that has haunted you for twelve stories is finally about to come to an end. So, without further ado, I give you the last – and the longest – story in the *Poison* series. I hope you'll be satisfied. Enjoy!

Poison

Goodbye

"You're such a loser, Sarafina."

Rolling her eyes, the cub regarded her best friend Sarabi with an expression that said she had heard this same line spoken a thousand times and that it was really getting old, so she would prefer it if she stopped. Not that she would, of course. Sarabi was a bit of a teaser. With such a fun-loving personality, it was only natural.

"What?" said Sarafina. "Just because I won't climb a tree?"

Staring up at the tree in question, Sarafina swallowed the lump in her throat and tried to hide the fact that she was absolutely terrified of heights. And loud noises, and being murdered by random maniacs, and a whole lot of other things that sometimes kept her up at night. Some of the other kids called her "scaredy cat" a lot, and – even though she hated to admit it – she conceded that they did kind of have a point.

You stupid geek, Sarafina told herself. *When are you ever gonna learn to stop being afraid of stuff?*

"Just because you won't climb a tree," Sarabi repeated. "This isn't just any old tree, Sarafina. This is a *challenge.* An *adventure*. Isn't that exciting enough for you?"

"But I don't want an adventure," Sarafina grumbled. She would have much preferred to go back home and watch cartoons. The outside world was just too dangerous for her. So many dangers… Nothing was safe. It made her feel vulnerable. "I

want to go home."

"Home is boring," Sarabi said, placing a paw against the trunk of the tree. "Climb this and you'll be a man!"

Sarafina was initially going to point out Sarabi's idiotic attempt to coax her into climbing the tree, but decided against it. Sometimes it was best to just let her talk and talk and talk. It was better than making her angry, which had resulted in a few boys who had tried to flirt with her running home with severe bruising.

"What if I fall and hurt myself?" Sarafina asked. "Or worse – what if I *die*? You won't have your best friend anymore."

"Don't be silly, Sarafina – you won't *die*," Sarabi retorted. "I've done this *billions* of times! If I can do it, then you can. It's a cinch."

"Thank you for your confidence," Sarafina said, still feeling no better about climbing this tree – or any of the other thousands of trees that lined the forest – while hoping that Sarabi's mother would call her for dinner so they could both forget all about this. "You know I'm not good with heights."

"You're not good with *anything*, Sarafina," Sarabi replied, nudging her towards the tree. "And that's why we're here. It's about time you learned to toughen yourself up. And if there's anyone who can teach you to do that, then it's me, right?"

Sarafina stared at her friend and gave her a meek smile. It did make sense, she supposed. Ever since she had met Sarabi, it had often been her who always made the choices whenever they were together. Sarafina would have loved to have her energy, her passion for having fun – but she believed herself to be too much of a klutz.

"I guess so," said Sarafina, shuffling her paws on the ground. "But the point is that I'd rather do something challenging that *doesn't* result in imminent death. I mean, what the heck would I do without my legs? Or my face? Or my brain?"

The cub didn't know that all three of those things would be quite damaged when she grew up, but for now she thought that she had managed to challenge Sarabi, who had placed a paw to her chin in contemplation.

"Hmm… Wait! I know!" She grinned at her friend. "If you try to climb the tree and end up falling, then I'll be down here to catch you! That's safe enough for you, right?"

"*You'll* catch me?" said Sarafina with a raised eyebrow, not knowing whether Sarabi had the strength or not to support her weight.

"Of course I will," said Sarabi, extending her forepaws. "Look at these muscles – I could lift an entire building."

"I'm still not sure about this," Sarafina said, shaking her head. "There are just way too many things that could go wrong. Can't we have a game of chess instead? That's much more intellectually—"

"Nerd alert!" interrupted Sarabi, letting out a fake yawn. "You're putting me to sleep here, Sarafina – *permanently*. You're never going to grow up if you play silly games like *that* all your life. They're for losers."

Sarafina noted that Sarabi had neglected to mention that she had bragged for hours on end after beating her at *Monopoly*. Such were the ways of her strange friend…

"If you say so," sighed Sarafina. "But if not climbing this makes me a loser, then so be it. I'm not climbing this tree."

"Aw, come on – stop being such a nerd all the time," Sarabi said. She placed a paw around her friend's shoulder, gesturing to the tree with the other. "Life is all about choices, Sarafina. Either you pick the fun thing to do, or the loser thing to do. Think about it."

"So you're saying that… if I do the sensible thing, everyone will hate me?" Sarafina said through narrowed eyes.

"Yes!" exclaimed Sarabi, her eyes lighting up with happiness. "Now you're getting the grasp of it! This isn't about being smart or sensible. It's about having the guts to go through with something that will result in nothing but hours and hours of fun!"

Mulling over Sarabi's words, Sarafina realised that they resonated with her in some way. She was pretty sick and tired of being bullied all the time by the other kids, so wouldn't it make sense to do something crazy to impress them, thus making her life much better off as a result? It seemed like quite an intelligent thing to do, actually. She would finally achieve some respect and a whole lot of fun. What more could a cub ask for?

"Maybe you're right," muttered Sarafina, awaiting some form of confirmation from her friend.

"Of course I am!" proclaimed Sarabi. "Now, get over there and climb that tree!"

Sarafina positioned herself in front of the tree, staring up at its tall trunk. While she took in the vast size of it, she decided that she would listen to Sarabi more often from now on. Her friend was right. If she chose to do the crazy thing rather than the smart thing, then she was always going to enjoy herself.

I guess Sarabi's pretty smart, actually! thought Sarafina as she started to scale the tree. *You won't be a nerd after this! Everyone's going to think you're great!*

Three broken bones and a severe drug addiction later, Sarafina regretted her decision for the rest of her life.

Bora tried not to throw up as TPYMK swerved around a sharp corner, the tyres of the car screeching as they created friction with the road. It was clear that the last human on earth was quite experienced with driving at high speeds. A man of many talents, it seemed.

He hated him even more for that.

"Jesus Christ!" Bora cried, clutching his seat belt as he TPYMK dodged an oncoming truck by mere nanoseconds. "What the hell kind of car is this, anyway?"

"Don't know, don't care," TPYMK replied briefly, keeping his eyes on the road.

Bora wasn't surprised in the least that he didn't know. After kidnapping him at the police station, the former detective had rushed over to the automobile dealership across the road and stolen the first car he could find. It was a fast one, that was for sure – and now Bora was feeling the full force of it.

"Think you could slow it down a little?" Bora asked, although he knew that TPYMK was not going to respond positively to his question.

"You have to be joking," TPYMK replied, reaching into his trenchcoat and ripping out the wires attached to the fake bomb that he had strapped to his shirt, shoving the contraption onto the back seat of the car. "We don't have any time."

Bora had figured out that the bomb was a fake as soon as TPYMK had forced him at gunpoint into the car. He knew that the guy was a complete psycho, but he wasn't crazy enough to blow up an entire building full of cops. One look at the comical-looking alarm clock that made up the bizarre ersatz explosive and he knew that it was just part of his ploy to get him to join forces with the murdering scumbag again. What he'd give just to put a bullet in his brain…

"No time, huh?" said Bora, narrowing his eyes at him. "What the hell is going on, jerkoff? What do you want from me, 'cause so far I've heard jack—"

"You know *exactly* what I want," TPYMK replied, turning into a dirt road, not slowing down by an inch. The car bumped up and down violently, causing Bora to almost slam his head against the ceiling. "The Family of Blood."

"Huh?" said Bora, ducking down low in his seat to prevent any injury. "I told you that we'd get 'em. It's not as if we don't know where we are after that little stunt you pulled yesterday, so it looks I did you a favour—"

"Don't you dare try to rationalise your actions with me," TPYMK snapped, staring angrily into Bora's eyes, ignoring the fact that he should have been concentrating on the road instead. "You handed Sarafina over to them without a second thought. You're just as bad as they are."

"Coming from the guy who murdered a baby, I think I'm on top here," Bora retorted. "You're hardly a saint yourself."

"You know, it's clear by now that we're never going to resolve our differences," TPYMK said, whizzing around another corner. "I did what I did for a good reason. You did what you did just so you would have a chance at getting a promotion."

"What are you talking about?" Bora asked. "My only interest is —"

"Making money?" interrupted TPYMK. "Just like them? If the Family of Blood killed Sarafina while they were in their captivity, then that would be the end of both cases. You're too afraid to try and get rid of me, so you thought you could have my so-called 'accomplice' killed instead. I'm pretty sure HPD would worship you for ever for that. Am I right?"

Bora said nothing. He just looked at TPYMK, who smiled in victory.

"Knew it," he said, turning his attention back to the road. "*Now* who has the moral high ground?"

They drove along in silence for a few moments. Bora stared out of the window, trying to avoid looking at TPYMK and instead surveying the scenery. It only took him about five seconds to realise that they were nowhere near the Family of Blood's shack. *Where on earth is this lowlife taking me now?*

"This isn't where they were," Bora told TPYMK. "We're heading right out into the middle of nowhere."

"No, we're not," TPYMK assured him. "I put in a call just before I came to the police station to a good associate of mine. Someone who will provide me with useful goods for the right price. We're going to need something special if we stand a chance of taking them out."

"So this is your plan?" said Bora. "Cold-blooded murder?"

"Do you honestly think that they're going to come quietly?" TPYMK asked. It was a good question. "You throw one of these degenerates in prison, and what happens? They escape. People like them have friends in high places. Trust me. I know from experience."

Bora frowned, not wanting to admit that the guy had a point. If the Family of Blood could afford the best Sumu cook in the world, it was likely that they could hire some experts who would break them out of jail within the space of an hour. Not that he was expecting them to surrender, anyway. They might get one or two of the losers into a cell; the rest, however, were likely to be shot dead by his men. But now it seemed that TPYMK wanted them all.

One thing was definitely certain. Someone was going to die tonight.

"*No! Stop it! Please!*"

Sarafina's pleas fell on deaf ears as Moto continued to whip her with the chain, landing blows on both her face and ribs. One side of her face had been totally lacerated, she could taste blood in her mouth, and her throat was sorer than ever from screaming all of the time. It was an involuntary reaction; she knew that no matter what she said, Moto would never stop hurting her.

"Aw, come on!" Moto said, grinning as he whipped Sarafina

across the back. "Smile a little! It's Whac-A-Pussy! Have some fun!"

Sarafina whimpered as the chain caught her lip, causing even more blood to dribble down to the ground, which was already soaked with the crimson liquid. She covered her face with both forepaws – which were still chained together – in an attempt to stop Moto from hitting her there, but it only caused more pain to be inflicted on the lower areas of her body.

She was in hell.

Ever since she had been caught trying to escape by Zira, the leader of the Family of Blood had made sure that Moto tortured her every hour of the day. The only other thing the guy did was smoke marijuana and snort Sumu, so he was all too happy to comply. He seemed to draw pleasure from it, evident by the fact that he had raped her several times over the course of the day. Due to her bonds, she was left powerless to resit.

Sarafina wondered at first why he was no longer dealing for them, but it soon became clear to her that this was no longer necessary. The Family of Blood had all the money they needed from this successful operation. They had millions. *Hundreds* of millions, in fact. Now that HPD knew where they were, it was only a matter of time before they decided to abandon ship and hire a plane to take them some remote country where they would never be found. The gang were in control all the way.

The lioness knew that she would be dead by then, but, by this point, she didn't really care. The pain she was experiencing right now was just too much for her to take. There was no hope for her. No light at the end of the tunnel. There was only agony, and then death. Her life, which had been a total waste of time ever since she had listened to Sarabi and taken drugs, was finally about to come to an end.

It made her cry.

"Aw – you crying, pussy?" Moto asked, whipping her across the

back, where several bloody scars were already gathered. "Maybe you should have thought about that before you ratted us out."

More tears leaked from Sarafina's eyes as she pressed her face into the ground, trying not to sob loudly – but failing miserably. She despised Moto more than anyone else she had ever met in her life.

What made it worse was the fact that he was the father of her baby.

It took Sarafina quite some time to figure it out, but things finally clicked into place during her endless suffering. Judging by who she had been sleeping with around the time she became pregnant, she finally came to the conclusion that Moto was most likely the father of her unborn child.

Her hatred for the cub had never been stronger.

"Crying won't save you," Moto said with a malicious smile. "We could have been great together, you know. That would have been the bomb. But you cheated on me with that other guy… I can't just let a slut like you get away with it."

Another strike of the whip caused Sarafina to shrink into the corner of the cell, as if it would provide some momentary protection from the onslaught of pain that Moto was attacking her with.

It didn't.

The chain collided with the top of her head, and Sarafina descended into unconsciousness for what seemed like the hundredth time that day, knowing full well that she would be violently woken up with a knife for doing so.

She dreamed of dying, and it felt good.

TPYMK slammed hard on the brakes and stopped the car, parking it neatly in one of the spaces outside the abandoned

Cheese-Mart. The suddenness of this would have caused Bora to smash his face through the windscreen if he hadn't been wearing a seat belt. TPYMK, however, remained calmly in place, as if he had simply been sitting at a desk doing nothing.

"What is it with you and complete hellholes?" Bora asked, staring through the window at the decaying building that had once been a rather popular store. "Oh, I'm sure you'll be able to get some great weapons from that piece of—"

"It's not the location," TPYMK said. "It's the remoteness. No innocent bystander is going to walk by while we're having an important meeting."

"And what if they *did*?" questioned Bora.

TPYMK gave Bora a malevolent stare. "Then we would deal with them," he answered in a cold, murderous tone. The last human on earth made sure that he was more frightening than usual. Even though it was obvious to Bora now that his bomb had been a fake, he still held the upper hand. As soon as he tried to escape, it would be all too easy for TPYMK to pull out his gun and shoot the lion in the head. Now *he* was in charge.

"Get out," TPYMK said, motioning with his gun for Bora to follow him, which he did.

"Don't think ordering me around is going to make me your slave," Bora told him. "'Cause it ain't gonna work."

"Duly noted," said TPYMK.

Slamming their doors shut, the former detective headed over to another car which was parked a few feet across from them. A muscly lion climbed out, shooting him a confused look.

"You again?" said Chaos, who TPYMK had done business with twice before. Both times had involved the purchase of ricin, an incredibly effective poison, although his efforts to use them on Moto and Bora respectively had failed. "Jesus, you've got more heat than a lioness in season. Let me guess: more ricin?"

"I don't need poison this time," TPYMK said, glancing at Bora, now somewhat glad that his efforts to kill him with ricin had failed. As much as he hated his company, he was a necessary part of his plan in eliminating the Family of Blood and rescuing Sarafina from them. "In fact, I was looking for something of a more… offensive capability."

"I see," said Chaos, glancing over his shoulder at his car. "Well, I got everything short of nuclear missiles, but it depends on what you're trying to do."

"I want something stealthy," the former detective told him. "Effective. Something which will kill instantly."

"I think I got just the thing you need," said Chaos after a moment of thought, motioning for TPYMK to follow him over to the back of the car. "Come on."

"You wait here," TPYMK told Bora, joining Chaos as he opened the trunk of the car. "So what do you have for me?"

"You a marble collector?" Chaos asked, reaching into the trunk and pulling out a small leather bag. Something which sounded like several small metal balls clanked together inside.

"What do you mean?" TPYMK asked through narrowed eyes. He didn't understand how a bag of marbles would be useful in taking out an entire drug gang. He was hoping for a small laser gun, or something of similar lethal effect. "No. I'm not."

"Well, you'll want to take it up after this," Chaos said, his gaze meeting with TPYMK's. The lion grinned. "Get what I'm saying?"

TPYMK grinned back at him as he realised the deadly effect of the bag. "I get what you're saying," he replied, making sure that Bora saw his wide, evil smile. "So… how much is this going to cost me?"

"This stuff is pretty cutting edge," said Chaos, reaching into the trunk to place the bag back inside. "It's gonna cost ya about—"

Bang!

Chaos didn't get a chance to finish as TPYMK pulled out his gun and shot him in the head.

"*Jesus!*" cried Bora, backing away in both surprise and fright.

The lion slumped to the ground, smearing a trail of blood and brains across the black surface of his car. TPYMK pocketed his gun and toed aside the body, shutting the trunk in the process. Whistling merrily, he headed back over to Bora, who could only stare at him in horror. He had terrified him.

"I just killed this man," TPYMK said, pointing to the corpse of Chaos. "He had a wife and two children. You are no different than him, and I can kill you just the same. *Now* are you going to do as I say?"

The lion's voice caught in his throat as he tried to reply. Bora was now completely convinced that TPYMK had gone completely insane. He had never seen him kill anyone before; he had only read about it in his file. Having witnessed it in person, he could now see that the man was a heartless lunatic.

"Y-yes," Bora stammered, which caused TPYMK's smile to widen even more.

TPYMK didn't mention, of course, that he had bended the truth slightly. Chaos did indeed have a wife and two children, but he had a drinking problem and violently abused them during all hours of the day. The lion deserved to die, and TPYMK believed that he had done a good thing in terminating his existence.

"Good," TPYMK said, sauntering over to Chaos' car. "Of course, the added advantage to this is that now we have his vast supply of equipment – for free. I think that's more than enough to kill the Family of Blood, don't you?"

Bora could only nod, still reeling from the effects of seeing TPYMK commit murder. He had only killed Chaos to make sure that Bora was scared stiff of him. Now he had his full

cooperation, and that was all he needed to ensure that his plan was a success.

Oh, yes. Fear was most definitely an effective motivator.

"Now, help me get this body into the car," TPYMK said, pointing at Chaos' dead body, "and then you're going to get into the other one and drive off."

"What?" asked Bora, bemused.

"You're going to go back to HPD and tell them where the Family of Blood are," TPYMK instructed. "Get your men together and organise a raid on that shack at midnight exactly. They're going to move in and get me and Sarafina out."

"What about the Family?" Bora said, as he helped TPYMK pick up Chaos by his arms and legs.

"They'll be dead by then," TPYMK said, loading his body into the back seat of the car. "All you have to do is sweep up what's left. After that, Sarafina and I will be on our way, and then… we're done. Understand?"

Bora nodded. "Yeah."

"Excellent," said TPYMK, shutting the door. "However, if you *don't* listen, and you tell them what I'm planning to do, then you know what will happen to you – and I can guarantee it'll be far worse than what just happened to that lion in the back seat."

"I get you," said Bora. TPYMK could still tell that he was terrified of him. As long as the fear was present, the former detective was confident that he would do as he said. People tended to get that way when they were under the threat of death. "Don't worry. I'll take care of it."

"You had better," TPYMK said, glancing up at his stolen car. "Now, is it just me, or is there a member of the Family of Blood sitting in that car?"

TPYMK and Bora both stared at the car, realising that there was indeed a member of the Family of Blood sitting there.

Vitani.

"Vitani!" Zira walked down the hallway, looking all around for any sign of her daughter. "*Vitani!*"

Descending a metal staircase, she opened the door to the Sumu lab and walked inside, hoping that Vitani would be there. However, all she saw was the cook, Hago, who was busy cleaning the surface of a tank with a damp cloth.

"Have you seen my daughter?" Zira asked, only to prompt a shrug from Hago.

"Not since earlier this morning," Hago told her. "I just finished a batch, though, so she can collect it whenever you find her."

"It'll be your last one," Zira said, causing the lion to look confused. "After today, we're not dealing anymore."

"Not dealing?" said Hago. "Why?"

"We have all we need," Zira said. "Enough money to keep us hidden from the police for the rest of our lives. After today, we torch the lab, and then we're out of here. I suppose it's about time you went into retirement."

"I see," Hago said. "I suppose I'd better pack things up and—"

"No," Zira snapped. "Until Vitani gets back, you wait down here."

"As you wish," nodded Hago, not wanting to make Zira angrier than she already was. The lioness had an incredibly bad temper, which had only been made worse by the amount of drugs that she was putting into her system.

Zira left the lab, slamming the door shut behind her. She didn't know where Vitani was, but when she returned, she was going to be punished sufficiently for disappearing without telling her

mother where she was going.

Children, thought Zira, walking away in search of some marijuana to smoke. *They're always so difficult.*

"What the hell are you doing here?" TPYMK demanded, whipping out his gun and pointing it right at Vitani's head. "You've got exactly five seconds to tell me."

The former detective noted that the cub looked incredibly nervous; she was shifting worriedly in her seat. She didn't seem threatening or dangerous at all. It was strange, TPYMK had to admit. Very strange indeed.

"I want your help," Vitani said quietly, trying to look at TPYMK and not the gun that was pressed against her forehead. "Please… don't kill me…"

"How did you find us here?" TPYMK asked, still training the gun on her. He didn't trust anyone who was involved with the Family of Blood. They were a sneaky bunch, capable of doing anything in order to get what they wanted. "Tell me right now."

"I… I followed you," Vitani stammered. "I knew you two were the cops from before, so I followed you and… I climbed into the trunk to hide."

"You were hiding in the trunk?" said TPYMK, glancing at the back of the car.

"I knew that you wouldn't talk to me unless I somehow managed to arouse your suspicions – like this," Vitani said, still sounding quite frightened. "Kill me if you want, but you have to understand that I never wanted any of this."

"Any of what?" asked Bora, inserting himself into the conversation. He was just as curious to find out why Vitani had become a stowaway in order to speak with them.

"My mother… forced me into this," Vitani explained. "This business. Made me do everything. She told me that it would be

easy – that I would make lots of money – but now I realise that she just wanted someone who would follow her orders without question. She made me work the whole thing. What you saw that day… that wasn't me. I had to act tough."

Upon hearing this – and deducing that Vitani was telling the truth, since he was good at detecting such things – TPYMK lowered the gun and placed it back into his pocket, his threatening expression softening.

"So what you're saying is that your mother kept you as a slave?" TPYMK said, imagining how horrible such a thing must be. "I suppose she just worded it a little differently."

"Pretty much," Vitani nodded. "She already gave my brother drugs and turned him into a maniac. I don't want the same thing to happen to me. I knew you were the only ones who could help… I didn't know who else to turn to."

"So what do you want from us?" Bora asked.

"I think that's the wrong question," said Vitani. "What do *you* want from *me*?"

TPYMK thought for a moment. "Does your mother know you're here?"

Vitani shook her head frantically. "No," she replied. "Of course not. I'd be dead if she found out what I was doing. She may act like she loves her children, but I know all she cares about is making money."

"So she still thinks you're part of her business," TPYMK concluded. A smile crossed his face, and he saw that he now had the perfect opportunity to strike the Family of Blood where it hurt. "Do you think you could get me into that shack?"

"Well… I should be able to," said Vitani. "Why?"

"Because I was planning on killing your mother tonight," TPYMK said, "and I think that you're just the cub to help me do it."

Coming down from yet another trip – she felt the need to use Sumu as much as possible now, since her stress levels were higher than ever – Zira rested her head against the cool surface of the table and waited for her painful headache to go away.

It was night by now, and the atmosphere had become much quieter, save for the occasional wail from Sarafina down in the cell. But those screams were perceived as being pleasant by Zira, who was satisfied that the rat was finally getting what she deserved.

It wouldn't last for long, however. Now that their operation was coming to a close, she was planning on moving her family away from this city by tomorrow afternoon – and that would mean ending the lioness's misery once and for all. A shame, really. It would have been nice to beat her up for just a few more days.

Torture of rats aside, Zira was still very much concerned – or angered, rather – by the fact that Vitani still hadn't returned yet. She didn't know of any important business that her daughter might be attending to, so her disappearance was very suspicious. She hoped that she hadn't decided to run away. She held little love for her child now, but Vitani was still very useful when it came to following orders. It was like having your own personal slave.

Where the hell is she? Zira wondered, just as the sound of a door opening echoed through the room.

Vitani entered, walking towards her mother. "Jesus, what took you so long?" Zira demanded, already infuriated by how calm her daughter seemed. She should have been on her knees, apologising over and over again for causing her so much worry. "Where the hell have you been, Vitani?"

"Sorry, Mom," said Vitani, "but I ran into a little trouble."

Instantly alert, Zira practically leapt at her daughter, grabbing her by both shoulders. "Trouble?" she exclaimed. "What kind of trouble? Talk to me, Vitani!"

"He's back," Vitani whispered, staring into her mother's eyes.

"Who's back?" asked Zira. For all she knew, anyone could be trying to attack them. She wouldn't be surprised to find that her gang had a long list of enemies. With all that money they had, people were bound to try and steal some. "Who?"

"Remember that cop?" Vitani asked. "The one we took the lioness from?"

"You mean that little rat?" Zira said, thinking of Sarafina down in the cell, who was currently being horribly tortured by Moto. "And the guy with the stupid coat?"

"Yeah – but he's not really a cop," Vitani told her. "He was just, you know… allied with the other one."

"What are you talking about?" Zira said. "If he's not a cop, then who the hell is he?"

"I don't know," Vitani said, as a concerned expression spread across her face, and Zira could see that the situation was a lot worse than it seemed. "But he kidnapped me."

"He… he kidnapped you?" Zira said slowly, filled with fury at the thought of anyone involved with the police touching her daughter. Only she was allowed to do that. "*That's* why you've been gone all day?"

"He wanted to send a message," Vitani explained. "He wants to meet with you… regarding her. And if you refuse, then he'll… he'll kill me."

Zira thought about what Vitani had said for a few seconds, and then burst out laughing. "Oh, I get it," she said, finally realising what TPYMK was planning to do. "He wants to make a deal to get her out. Well, isn't that sweet?"

"Mom, just let her go," Vitani said. "If you get rid of that lioness, then there won't be any more trouble and— *Ow!*"

Zira slapped her cub hard across the face again, irritated by the

fact that she always seemed so willing to surrender to the opposite end of the law.

"*Let her go?*" she screamed. "*Let her go?* She's not a lioness – she's a filthy rat! And, cop or no cop, *no one* is gonna make me let her go! She is mine to do with as I please! Do you understand?"

"Yes," Vitani said, shaken up by the slap. "But what are we going to do about him?"

"I'll tell you what we're going to do about him," Zira said, looking in the direction of the door. "You go find him and tell that idiot to come in here and we'll meet. No one tries to mess with me and gets away with it. Where the hell is he?"

"He's outside," Vitani said. "I had the guards keep him by the door."

"Good girl," said Zira. "You actually did something smart for once. Now, get him in here."

Vitani nodded and headed out of the room, leaving a snarling Zira.

That dirty scumbag, she thought, baring her teeth viciously. *It's about time he found out why the Family of Blood lives up to its name.*

TPYMK waited patiently outside the shack, glancing periodically at the three guards who had him surrounded on all sides, machine guns pointed quite firmly at his head. They were the same three who had shot at him, Sarafina and Bora before, blowing up the Junk-Mobile in the process. Two of them had dragged Sarafina away – perhaps to her doom – and were just as easy to hate as Zira.

The truth of the matter was that he didn't know whether Sarafina was alive or not. For all he knew, the Family of Blood could have had her killed earlier this morning, or in the

afternoon, or even ten minutes ago. Even if she *was* alive, then she would be in terrible pain, and the only saving grace would be that he would do his best to nurse her back to health when his business was concluded.

However, if she was dead, and the Family of Blood had indeed murdered her, then, in her honour, he would murder them in return. These people had caused far too much misery by this point, and putting them in jail simply wasn't enough. Bora and the rest of HPD wouldn't see to that; they didn't work like him. He knew what had to be done, though. The Family of Blood had to die. Tonight.

The door to the shack creaked open, and Vitani poked her head out. She glanced at the guards and then at TPYMK.

"Bring him in," she said.

The three guards nodded. Two of them grabbed TPYMK by the shoulders and forced him through the open doorway. The former detective kept his eyes on what was in front of him as he was shoved down a dark hallway, which opened out onto a grimy room filled with little more than a table and a few chairs.

Unlike Sarafina, he had never been inside this shack before, and so everything he saw was completely new to him. He made a mental note of the place, taking in every inch of the room he could with what little time he had.

The most important thing in the room, of course, was Zira, and she didn't look very happy at all. There was no evil smile, no sinister grin; just a look of pure fury and disgust for the man who she was staring at.

"So you're back again," said Zira. "Even after we told you to stay out of territory. You know, I don't like it when people disobey my orders. It makes me… testy."

"So what?" shrugged TPYMK, surveying the other people in the room. He could see Moto, a lanky lion who was scratching himself repeatedly, and another lion who the former detective

guessed had to be the cook. Zira had obviously called them up to witness his execution. He knew that there would be no deal between them this time. She was going to have him killed. "You have something that I want."

"Yeah – your little rat friend," Zira said. "Well, guess what? You ain't getting her. A deal's a deal. She's mine now."

"You'd better give her back to me," TPYMK threatened, hiding his happiness at the fact that Sarafina was still alive. "Or else."

"Or else what?" Zira asked. She glanced at one of her guards. "You search him?"

"We took his gun," the guard replied, raising the weapon in question so Zira could see it. "And these." He held up a small leather bag.

"Marbles? Jesus, it's like being in preschool all over again," Zira said. She raised her eyebrows at TPYMK. "Well, it seems like you don't have two legs to stand on right now. No gun, no partner, no little rat… You're done. And now I'm gonna make sure of it." She looked at her guards. "Give me a gun. I want to take care of him personally."

"I don't see why you won't let me have her," TPYMK said. "All I want to do is kill her myself."

Zira looked surprised. "You wanna kill her, too?" she said. "Why in the hell would you do that?"

"Sarafina is in pain," TPYMK said. "I know you've done God only knows what to her. It's about time someone gave her a mercy killing."

Zira chuckled at this. "Jesus Christ," she said. "You came all the way out here just to put her down?"

TPYMK nodded. "I don't want her to suffer any longer," he said. "You let me kill her, and then you can do whatever you want to me. One bullet to the forehead is all it'll take."

"Well, it just so happens that we were planning on getting rid of her anyway," Zira told him. She turned to Moto. "Moto, bring that rat up here. I'm sick and tired of all this dealing stuff; let's end this right now."

"You sure?" said Moto. "I was kinda hoping I could… 'get busy' with her later on… if you catch my junk."

Jesus Christ, thought TPYMK, sickened to his stomach to think that this slimy piece of filth had been touching Sarafina without her consent. Zira must have put him in charge of "taking care" of Sarafina, which could only mean that he was responsible for her grisly torture. He truly was the lowest of the low.

"Just get her the hell in here, Moto!" Zira ordered. "Do it, or the only sex you'll be having is when I make you swallow your own balls."

"Whatever, pussy," Moto muttered as he headed down the hallway, clearly not happy about being forced to release his prisoner.

"You happy now?" Zira asked TPYMK.

"Yes." He nodded slowly. "I'm happy."

"Good," said Zira. "I'm sick of all this… Why can't you guys just give me a break? All I'm doing is trying to make a living here and you keep on messing with my business."

"You're not in the business anymore, though," TPYMK said. "I forced your daughter to tell me. You have more than enough money now to last fifty lifetimes. I'm willing to bet that by tomorrow you'll be disappearing to someplace far away. Somewhere you can never be caught."

Zira smiled. "That's the idea," she said. "We won't have to worry about rats or cops or people like you ever again. Paradise."

"Which makes people like you obsolete," TPYMK said to Hago.

"No need for a cook anymore." Then he turned to the guards. "Or security. What's to stop her from killing you and taking all of your money back?"

"Don't try to turn them against me," Zira said. "I'll pay 'em off so they keep their mouths shut. No need to kill people I don't have to. They're not like you."

"Here," said Moto, who had entered the room again.

And Sarafina was with him.

TPYMK, of course, hadn't had a chance to look at Sarafina ever since she had been taken prisoner by the Family of Blood. Suffice to say, she was in a terrible state. Her forelegs and hind legs were chained together, her body was covered in bruises, and blood was spattered across her fur, which had become discoloured and messy.

"Just put her in front of him," Zira said.

But the worst part about it, as Moto dragged Sarafina in front of TPYMK, was the look in her eyes. It seemed that the scars were on the inside as well. She looked… soulless. Like she had lost the will to live. It broke TPYMK's heart to see her this way. She was hurting on a level that he could never comprehend.

"Give him his gun," Zira told the guard who had searched him. "Just shoot her in the head so I can kill you."

As he took his gun back, TPYMK and Sarafina stared into each other's eyes. There were no words between them. What could either of them say in this kind of situation? TPYMK was too horrified by her condition and Sarafina was frightened that he was actually going to kill her. The silence was agonising.

"Well?" Zira asked. "You gonna do this or what?"

A few more seconds passed.

And then TPYMK leaped on Sarafina.

Zira laughed at the sight of the two wriggling forms. "I thought you were gonna shoot her, not hump her," she said. "Jesus, you two have to be the most insane fu—"

Boom!

She didn't get a chance to say anything further as an explosion occurred from behind, knocking her to the ground in surprise.

TPYMK did his best to shield Sarafina as much as possible, closing his eyes and hoping for dear life that Chaos' weapon had worked.

The bag of "marbles" had exploded, releasing several metal balls which rolled across the room – and then started shooting out nails.

The three guards cried out as their bodies were impaled against the wall by the long metal shards, puncturing their throats, eyes and chests. They were dead before they even had a chance to question what had happened.

Nuka was about to ask his mother for his next hit when a nail pierced his tongue, followed by his heart, ending his pitiful existence for good. He tumbled to the ground, blood spilling from his lethal wounds.

Hago no longer had eyeballs; two nails had taken their place. Three more had shot right through his chest and out through his back, killing him within seconds. He made a disturbing gurgling noise as blood erupted from his throat, and then he fell silent.

The noise was deafening, but TPYMK didn't dare try to cover his ears for fear that Sarafina might get hit by one of the nails. If one of them was going to be hurt, then he would make sure that it would be him. No harm would come to this lioness ever again.

But, as the noise died down, and the weapon ceased its barrage of deadly metallic implements, he came to realise that he had

been very lucky to come out of this battle unscathed.

Lifting his head up, TPYMK surveyed the scene, pleased to find that the weapon had worked perfectly. The three guards, Nuka and Hago had been killed easily, unable to do anything to fight back against the attack.

Sarafina whimpered underneath TPYMK as he helped her to her paws. She hadn't come out of this without being hurt. She hadn't been hit by any of the nails, but the pain that she had suffered because of Moto was sure to haunt her for ever.

TPYMK soon saw that they weren't the only ones who had been lucky. Vitani was curled up in a ball, hiding behind a chair, having been told beforehand by the former detective of what he was planning to do. She gave him a slight nod, indicating that she was fine. Incredibly shaky, but fine.

However, Moto had been hiding underneath the table throughout all of this, doing the smart thing – for once in his life – and seeking cover from the barrage of deadly nails. He was unhurt.

"Jesus…" Moto said breathlessly as he climbed out from under the table, most of which had been destroyed by the assault. He looked around at the dead bodies strewn across the room, his eyes wide with amazement.

"Holy cum-balls…"

That was when Sarafina struck.

Using the chains that were attached to her forelegs, she wrapped them around Moto's neck and yanked the cub to the floor, strangling him with all her might. Her energy had been completely drained as a result of this monster torturing her, but she had more than enough hatred in her soul to finish him off once and for all.

Choking and gasping, Moto struggled frantically to escape, his legs flailing all over the place. But Sarafina held on for dear life,

violently throttling the cub with no intention of ever letting go.

Sarafina grunted and groaned as she strangled Moto, whose resistance was very strong, straining all of her muscles in order to make sure that he would never get away. This was it for him. She wanted revenge, and she was going to get it.

Moto continued to choke, attempting to grab the chain which Sarafina was strangling him with, but he was simply too weak by this point. The cub let out one final gasp, and – *snap!*– his neck broke.

And that was the end of Moto.

Sarafina shoved his corpse to one side, satisfied that justice had been served. She groped for a pair of keys on the floor – which must have come from one of the deceased guards – and started to unlock the chains which bound her legs together.

TPYMK strode over to the wall, where Zira lay. She wasn't dead, but she didn't have very long left in this world. One nail had tethered her foreleg to the wall, while another had struck her right through the middle of the chest. She coughed up blood, life fading from her fast.

"What do you want now?" Zira rasped, barely able to process a coherent word. "You gonna gloat?"

"No," TPYMK said, raising his gun. "Goodbye, Zira."

He pulled the trigger and shot her in the head.

Leaving the dead body of the drug lord, he turned his attention to Sarafina, who was free from the chains at long last. He regarded her thin, weak, frail body, and could only speak three words. Three words which happened to be the first ones he had ever spoken to her.

"Are you okay?"

For a few seconds, Sarafina just gazed into TPYMK's eyes—

—and then burst out crying, hugging his body tightly.

TPYMK hugged her back, feeling the force of the lioness's saddened sobs as she let all the hurt out. It was clear to him that the events had traumatised Sarafina, and it was going to take a lot for her to return to normal. But he didn't care about that. She was safe, and that was all that mattered.

"Don't worry, Sarafina," he said, stroking her back gently. "It won't ever happen again. I promise."

He ignored the yells of the armed police officers as they crashed through the door of the shack, aiming their guns all around the place. It must have been midnight by now, meaning that Bora had decided to listen to TPYMK after all and ordered HPD to raid the place.

And it was that lion in question now who approached TPYMK, staring at him and Sarafina with a rather stunned expression.

"You all right?" Bora asked, and TPYMK nodded in reply.

It was over.

"So you did it," Bora said, as he stood outside the shack.

Most of the police officers were gathered around the field, along with a few paramedics who were loading the dead bodies into the ambulance. Vitani was being given a glass of water by another one, a blanket draped around her shoulders as she was checked over for any injuries.

She was going to be just fine from now on.

Sarafina also had a blanket around her, sat on the ground next to TPYMK as he spoke with Bora. She had since stopped crying, and was now insistent on going home for a good night's sleep after they were finished here.

"I suppose I've gotta hand it to you," Bora said, although he didn't want to admit it at all. He could see quite clearly now that

TPYMK had done a good thing for the right reasons, but he still despised him with a passion.

"My work here is done," TPYMK said, glancing momentarily at the shack. "I think it's safe to say that's the last big drug empire this city is ever going to have. No one would dare try to imitate the Family of Blood after they were murdered in such a brutal fashion. I suppose you could say I've done you a favour."

"I guess so," said Bora. He looked around. "Well, I told these cops that stunt you pulled was just a training exercise, so… it looks like you're free to go."

"And her?" TPYMK asked, looking at Sarafina.

Bora stared at the lioness for a few moments, and then nodded. "And her."

"Good," said TPYMK.

Askari wandered past Bora at that moment, clapping him on the shoulder with a friendly grin on his face.

"Well done, buddy," he said.

"Yeah – thanks," Bora smiled, watching as his partner walked off. He took a deep breath, still facing TPYMK and Sarafina. "So… now what?"

"As I said…" TPYMK smiled. "We're done."

With that, TPYMK tapped Sarafina lightly on the shoulder, and the two of them walked away from the field – and away from their troubles.

"Well… that's the end of that," Bora said, turning around to see Maarifa heading towards him, carrying a steaming cup of coffee.

"Coffee for you, boss," she said, handing him the cup.

"Thanks. I sure as hell need it," Bora said, before taking a big gulp from the cup. He then spat some of it out, coughing and spluttering. "Jesus Christ, Maarifa! This stuff tastes like poison!"

He didn't see TPYMK smiling from in the distance…

Six Months Later…

"So… that's my story, I guess. All I can say to you guys is… don't make my mistake. As soon as I smoked that first joint… my life just got worse and worse. Sure, I may have met someone great, but… sometimes that's not enough. A lot of bad things can happen if you start using drugs, and I can only hope that this will serve as… well, uh… an example. Yeah. So, um… thanks for listening."

"All, right! Let's give a big hand for Sarafina, dudes!"

The leader of the rehab group, Shauri, smiled at Sarafina and clapped loudly, as did all of the other members. They had inspired looks on their faces, and it didn't look as though these people were going to try drugs ever again.

This was the fifth talk that Sarafina had given at group sessions and schools now, and she was pretty pleased with herself for deciding to pursue the job. She figured that if she had taken things away from people when she was a dealer before, then perhaps now she could try and give something back. It was her moral duty, she felt.

The reaction was always the same. Everyone was enthralled – and just a little bit scared – by her life story, and she concluded that no one she talked to was going to be interested in even trying drugs. It was a big aid for anti-drug groups, and the more talks she did, the happier she was to help.

Having finished the talk and answered any questions that her listeners had, Sarafina left the rehab building and headed across the parking lot, taking a deep breath of fresh air. Thankful to be alive.

The scars and bruises that she had suffered from Moto were now almost completely gone, leaving her face as beautiful as it always had been when she was just a cub. She was very much an attractive lioness now, showing very little signs that she had

ever been a drug addict.

The only things that remained were memories. And – even though they could sometimes still hurt – Sarafina knew that she could live with that. Her life was much better now.

A car pulled up alongside Sarafina. It just so happened to look identical to the Junk-Mobile. The lioness smiled when she saw it. Clearly, she wasn't the only one who had a fondness for the car.

"Hey," said TPYMK, smiling at Sarafina as she climbed into the passenger seat. "You all right?"

"Yeah," Sarafina said, opening the passenger door.

"How did it go?" TPYMK asked.

"It went great," Sarafina said, slumping into her seat. "I really feel like I'm helping out, you know? Doing something right for once. It's… good."

"Good to hear," TPYMK said, patting Sarafina gently on the shoulder, causing her to catch a glimpse of the ring he was wearing on his index finger. It was a sight that made her smile. "About time you found a decent occupation."

Sarafina placed her hind paws up on the glove compartment. Her toenails had been repainted purple, her claws healthy once more. It may have looked ridiculous, but she thought that it made her unique. One would have had to look quite closely, but she was also wearing a ring on her smallest toe. A ring that just so happened to be identical to TPYMK's…

"So what's for dinner, jerkoff?" Sarafina asked, grinning at TPYMK. "Happy Meal?"

TPYMK chuckled and nodded at her. "Happy Meal."

As they drove off into the setting sun, Sarafina thought that maybe her old friend Sarabi had been right. Life was all about choices. You could either make the smart, sensible choice, or

the dumb choice that would result in nothing but disaster. And, as Sarafina rested her head on TPYMK's shoulder, she felt that maybe she had made the right choice after all.

There was very little that could poison them now.

The End

AN: And that, my dear readers, is the end of *Poison*. The Family of Blood is dead, Vitani is free, and as for TPYMK and Sarafina… Well, you can probably guess from the rings what happened to them. A peaceful ending.

This has been a fantastic series for me to work on, and it is definitely the favourite of all my works I have written for the forum. I'm incredibly proud of these thirteen stories, which rank up as some of my best. I am just a little bit sad that this is the last we'll ever see of TPYMK and Sarafina, but the fact that they had a happy ending is satisfaction enough for me. I feel that everyone got what they deserved. Or did they? I think it's pretty open how you interpret what happened to Bora…

Well, I do hope that you'll leave a long review for this series, since it was incredibly long and almost caused all of my fingers to drop off while writing it, so it's the least you can do, surely? If not, then expect TPYMK to visit your house to use his deadly bag of marble… nail… thingies on you.

Nah – I'm just kidding. Goodbye for now, and thank you very much for reading *Poison*.

—ThatPersonYouMightKnow